

SEIJO ENGLISH MONOGRAPHS

————— NO. 15 —————

KEATS AND HIS SONNETS

BY

TOHRU MATSUURA

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, SEIJO UNIVERSITY



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INTRODUCTION

In view of both quality and bulk, Keats's sonnets, which are sixty-eight in all, seem to be of utmost importance. But, strange to say, a systematic study of them has long been neglected by many reviewers. As far as I know there is only one book by Mr. L. J. Zillman. It is a pity, however, that the aim of the work lies not in the clarification of the poet's spiritual development but in the structural study of Keats's sonnets. One of the reasons why they have not been studied as an organic unity, may be attributed to the compiling method of Keats's sonnets. Almost all the editors of Keats's poems have taken a unanimous method of arranging and printing them as they originally stood¹⁾—that is, in the form of the three separate volumes of 1817, 1818, 1820 and the three appendant volumes after his death. And the result ends with much confusion; the whole sonnets of Keats have been carelessly scattered over the various sections of his poetical works. This caused the sonnets to be dispersed in different volumes and missed a unified study for a long time. And Keats's sonnets have been considered irrelevant and unconnected one another or subordinate to longer poems which occupy cardinal position in his works. Such disorder is, I think, due to the situation of their composition. I mean the sonnets of Keats do not form a "sequence" such as those of Shake-

1) There are a few exceptions. Sidney Colvin, J. M. Murry and Miriam Allott take a chronological method in compiling their books of Keats. And regarding sonnets only, I know one: *The Collected Sonnets of John Keats* (The Halcyon Press, Maastricht, 1930), which includes 64 sonnets of Keats.

speare, because they were written at each separate moment of his whole poetic career. They are, so to speak, the fallen ears strewn after the reaper Keats over the vast field of his poetic art. So I hold it necessary to pick them up one by one and put them on a closer study. For that purpose, I find there is no better way than to assume a chronological method.

To bring Keats's sonnets into an organic whole and divide them again into some groups according to their content, is important for hoarding up the scattered remnants of his mind and weaving them into some tangible patterns.

In making a systematic study of Keats's sonnets, we must recall to mind Keats's famous letter to Reynolds where he compared a life of an artist to a large mansion of many apartments. There is first the Thoughtless Chamber, which symbolizes a mere life of sensation; then comes the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, where the poet, invoked by the awakening of his thinking principle, becomes consciously intoxicated with the gorgeous wonders of the sensuous world, but at the same time he perceives that "the world is full of misery, heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression". From this chamber onward, there open many doors all leading to dark passages, but all dark in a mystery of human knowledge. He says he cannot see "the balance of good and evil". He is in a complete mist of skepticism, and he feels the Burden of Mystery, to the point of which he conceives Wordsworth has come as a result of his retrospection in *Lines Composed A Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*. This wandering through many chambers to dark passages is in a strange coincidence with Keats's mental development through sonnets. His artistic evolution was traced step by step to his final goal of the principle of Beauty through innumerable antinomies.

And I think the secret of his poetic growth gained after each gradation is best portrayed in his sonnets, because they were composed respectively in his whole poetic career.

My present purpose is, therefore, to present a useful classification of Keats's sonnets according to their content and date of composition, and then to make a scrutinized research into the inner value of the sonnets in parallel with his life.

The main body of his sonnets might be, for convenience's sake, classified under the following four groups :

- (1) The first group of 38 sonnets. They belong to *the Period of Wonder* (from 1814 to April 1817). In metrical form, thirty-seven are Petrarchian, and one Shakespearean.
- (2) The second group of 14 sonnets. They belong to *the Period of Self-Awakening* (from Jan. 1818 to April 1818). Nine of them are Shakespearean, four the Petrarchian and one an experiment.
- (3) The third group of 8 sonnets. They are those belonging to *the Period of Agony* (from July 1818 to March 1819).
- (4) The fourth group of 8 sonnets. They come under *the Period of Crystallization* (from April 1819 to Sept. 1820). Six of them are the Shakespearean and the other two new experiments.

Of each of the groups, I will hereafter make an elucidation, as demonstratively as possible, often quoting some or all of sonnets, under the four chapters. The pages that follow are, therefore, such attempt of mine.

Table I Petrarchian Sonnets

Date of Composition	Title or the first line	Sestet rhyme-no.
1814 Dec.	"As from darkening gloom..."	2

1814 Dec.	To Lord Byron	2
1815 Feb.	To Chatterton	2
Feb. 3	Written on the day Mr. L. Hunt left prison	2
Oct.—Nov.	“O solitude...”	2
1815—1816		
Mar.—Apr.	“Woman! when I behold thee flippant...”	2
	“Light feet, dark violet eyes...”	2
	“Ah! who can e'er forget so fair a being?”	2
1816 Feb.	“Had I a man's fair form...” (cde cde)	3
June	“To one who has been long in city pent”	2
June 29	To a Friend who sent me some roses	2
Aug.	To my brother George	3
	“Oh, how I love, on a fair summer's eve”	3
Oct.	On First Looking into Chapman's Homer	2
Oct.—Nov.	“Keen, fitful gusts are whispering...”	2
	On leaving some Friends at an Early Hour	3
	To a young lady who sent me a Laurel crown	2
	On Receiving a Laurel Crown from Leigh Hunt	3
(Allott 1817)	To the Ladies who saw me crown'd (cd ce cd)	3
	“How many Bards gild...” (cddcdc)	2
Nov. 18	To my Brothers (cd cd ee)	3
Nov.	Addressed to Haydon (I) (cdcece)	3
Nov. 20	Addressed to Haydon (II) (cdcded)	3
Dec.	To G. A. W.	2
Dec.	To Kosciusko (cde dce)	3
Dec. (undated)	“Happy is England! ...” (cde dec)	3

Dec. 22 (Murry & Stillinger)	Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition (cdcdde)	2
Dec. 30	On the Grasshopper and Cricket (cde cde)	3
1817 Jan. 31	"After dark vapours have oppress'd..." (cdcede)	3
Mar. (Allott)	On 'the Story of Rimini'	2
	Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (cde cde)	3
Feb. 27.	Written on a blank space (cdd cee)	3
Feb.	The poet (cdd cee)	3
Feb.	To Leigh Hunt, Esq. (cd ce ce)	3
Mar. 1-2	On Seeing the Elgin Marbles (cd cd cd)	2
Mar. 1-2	To B. R. Haydon	2
April 17	On the Sea (cde dec)	3
1818 Jan. 16	To Mrs. Reynolds' Cat	2
Jan. 22	On Sitting Down to Read 'King Lear' ... (cdc dee)	3
Feb. 4	To the Nile (cd cd cd)	2
Mar.	On a Picture of Leander (cde dec)	3
Jul. 1	On Visiting the Tomb of Burns (cde dec)	3
Jul. 10	To Ailsa Rock (cd cd cd)	2
Jul. 18	"Of late two dainties..." (cdc dee)	3

1819 mid-Apr.

(Gittings & Allott)

"The House of Mourning..."

Table II Shakespearean Sonnets

Date of Composition	Title or the first line	rhyme-no.
1814 Apr. (Allott & Stillinger)	On Peace (abab cdcd dded ee)	7

1818 Jan. 22-31	“When I have fears that I may...”	7
Feb. 4	To—(“Time’s sea...”)	7
Feb. 5	To Spenser	7
Feb. 8	Answer to a Sonnet...	7
Mar. 13? (Forman)		
	“Four Seasons fill the measure...”	7
Apr. 27? (L. 63)		
	To Homer	7
Apr.	To J. R. (abab cdce fg fg hh)	8
Spring (Murry)		
	To A. G. S.	7
July 11	“This mortal body of a thousand days”	7
Aug. 2	Written upon the Top of Ben Nevis	7
Sept. 21 (Allott)		
	“Nature withheld Cassandra...”	7
1819 Mar. 18	“Why did I laugh tonight?”	7
Apr. 15-16	On a Dream	7
Apr. 30	On Fame (“How fever’d...”)	7
Apr. 30	On Fame (“As Hermes once...”)	8
	(abab cdcd efegf)	
Oct. 11-21 (Gittings)		
	“The day is gone...” (abab cdce fgfg hh)	8
Oct. 11-21	“I cry your mercy...”	7
1820 Sept. 29?		
(Allott Oct. 1)	Bright Star (Final Version)	7
First Version		
1818 Last week of October (Gittings)		
1819 Feb. (Colvin & Spurgeon)		
Apr. 15-16 (Amy Lowell)		
July 25. (M. B. Forman)		

Table III New Experiments

Date of Composition	Title or the first line	rhyme-no.
1818 Feb. 19	"O thou whose face..." (No rhyme except line 9 & 11)	12
before Apr. 30	To Sleep (abab cdcd bc efef)	6
Apr. 30— May 3	"If by dull rhymes our English..." (abc abd bab bd bd)	4

I

A SWEET REPRIEVE

According to Sidney Colvin¹⁾, the early sonnets of Keats falls into the three groups: the first is the sex-chivalry group including "Woman, when I behold thee flippant," "Had I a man's fair form," and others, the second those concerning about Leigh Hunt, and the third the autumn group definitely recording the happiness received by the young poet from his intercourse with Hunt and his friends. But this classification seems to miss the vital point which was characteristic of Keats in those days, and the distinction of each group is much blurred and interrelated together. And the trouble is that there are not a few sonnets which do not come into the three categories. What was then the specific character of those sonnets grouped in this period? Though it may be difficult to classify them in a single theme, we can at least characterize them as those embodying 'wonder'²⁾ or 'a sweet reprieve'.

As explicitly seen in the first group of 38 sonnets of Keats', the main feature is a cry of wonder, young and vivacious, rich and moving when the poet first entered a poetic kingdom. Wonder of the beauty of nature, wonder of the pleasing charm of medieval and ancient romance, wonder of the sweet thought of tender affection—all express his fresh desire to emancipate from the cares of the practical world and to be completely absorbed in the pure

1) Sidney Colvin: *John Keats, His Life and Poetry, His Friends Critics and After-Fame* (Macmillan, 1918), pp. 89-91.

2) cf. Stuart M. Sperry says that the best of Keats's verse is "characterized by the sudden start of surprise or recognition." (*Keats the Poet*, Princeton, 1973), p. 76.

sphere of sensation. This boyish yet enthusiastic representation of mind is brought in extremity into a sort of ecstasy and sometimes it ends with a mere wording of aesthetic pleasure. And the poet's eye is concentrated only at the beautiful to the exclusion of the ugly and the gloomy. What does this imply?

It means he sought for a far-off land with romantic indulgence, far from the entanglements of human reality, but not that he was a mere romantic poet with no insight into reality. His true home of poetry, however, could not remain there long and demanded much more concrete basis of its own in the very suffering of humanity.

Nevertheless, most of Keats's sonnets pertaining to this period apparently show us his deficiency in logical thinking as well as his inclination of ecstatic abstraction. And his figure found in them is sentimental, fantastic, delicate and unearthly Keats. Indeed he dimly perceived that mere dreaming would not make a true poet of him, but still he adhered to the realm of fancy. Why? Because he believed the highest form of art could be accomplished through the sensuous experience of nature, art, mythology and so on—through the expression of his sense of wonder.

So if we attempt to analyze the sense of wonder according to the types of objects depicted, the following classification may be acceptable: wonder of nature, wonder of humanity, and wonder of art. First comes wonder of nature.

For him, nature was the world full of beauty, consolation and poetry and even suggestive of a strange dream land behind it. But we must keep in mind that his view of nature seldom had any moral meaning of natural philosophy as Mr. Courthope¹⁾ interprets

1) W. J. Courthope: *A History of English Poetry*, vol. IV (Macmillan, 1926), p. 323.

in connection with Wordsworthian theory of it. Keats's concept of nature was at its earliest stage purely sensuous and far from the agony of the real world as well as any religious creed. And the rapture he felt for nature was not such a passionate 'aching joy'¹⁾ as that of Wordsworth in his 'thoughtless youth'. It was not so much animal-like joy as empathic and highly sensuous one of the young imaginative genius. In later years Keats's view of nature gradually transformed itself into a spiritualized nature which had reflected the poet's inner soul, but not in this period. Apart from reality, Keats sought in nature for a source of poetical inspiration, yet his view of nature was imbued with the joy of pure sensation. Plunging himself into the heart of nature was made without any fear, any hesitation or preliminary pause of thinking. It was truly an act of self-absorption, followed by trance-like ecstasy. The following sonnet is a cry of the poet who made an intuitive and naive communication with the soul of nature.

"To one who has been long in city pent" is indeed a typical sonnet in which the poet's breathless adoration for nature keeps a sweet harmony with his naked joy freed from suffocating urban life and with his sincere prayer to the sky for "the illimitable stage of free, untrammelled motion".²⁾

To one who has been long in city pent,
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven,—to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.
Who is more happy, when, with heart's content,
Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair

1) W. Wordsworth: *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, 84.

2) Bernard Blackstone: *The Consecrated Urn* (Longmans, 1959), p. 42.

Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair
And gentle tale of love and languishment?
Returning home at evening, with an ear
Catching the notes of Philomel,—an eye
Watching the sailing cloudlet's bright career,
He mourns that day so soon has glided by:
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.

Light, colour, sound and motion are the very characteristic materials of Keats's synaesthetic imagery. They are combined, transfused and dissolved into one sweet harmony in this sonnet. Professor R. H. Fogle says that "Shelley's vision is usually directed either up or down, while Keats looks out before him, horizontally".¹⁾ But he overlooks Keats's another important trait that the poet blends nature inseparably with some far-off legends in Greece and Rome. This fusion of nature and classical mythology was Keats's great property. Here Keats depicts the glorious beauty of the day spent in the rustic country of England. In every line, every phrase, there flushes out the touching joy of the poet, with direct intensity appealing to our heart. And this power of emotive response carries him farther into the visionary realm of pathetic mythology. So the song of a nightingale gets soon identical with the sad note of tongueless Philomel. Thus nature furnishes him with a ground to create a poetic kingdom. It was in this view that he called it at one time "maker of sweet poetry" and at another emphatically exclaimed:

For what has made the sage or poet write

1) R. H. Fogle: *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley* (The University of North Carolina, 1949), p. 37.

But the fair paradise of Nature's light?¹⁾

Facing the unusual tranquil beauty of nature, Keats became oblivious of the present field of reality and then found himself in another visionary world. This detachment was solely made with the faculty of imagination. Imagination was the very means with which Keats could leave the commonsense world and make an identity with any object of his thinking. And this enabled him to have a sympathy with Philomela, a tragic heroine and to create a world of 'essential beauty'.

We find also another example of his naive joy and rapture in the sonnet, "Oh! How I Love, on a Fair Summer's Eve".²⁾ In the midst of it is found the passage that reveals the secret of his aesthetic absorption in nature.

...far—far away to leave

All meaner thoughts, and take a sweet reprieve
From little cares; to find, with easy quest,
A fragrant wild, with Nature's beauty drest,
And there into delight my soul deceive.²⁾

The extract above illustrates that nature was to him a haven of temporary refuge to lay aside the pains and sorrows of humanity. Real life was repulsive because it was severe enough to break a fragile dream of the poet, while nature was receivable because it gave the poet a stepping stone to his imaginary flight. So can we not consider he could on one hand separate himself sharply from the woe-laden actual world, but on the other make an aesthetic absorption into all-embracing nature and also into the poetic world

1) "I Stood Tip-toe...", 125-126.

2) "Oh! How I Love, on a Fair Summer's Eve", 4-8.

of his predecessors, "musing on Milton's fate—on Sidney's bier"?

It was a perfect, self-absorbing thrust as well as enthusiastic penetration into nature and the bards in the past. This spontaneous and over-strained spirit of the poet would not pass over anything in nature. In fact the song of a bird, the rustle of small creatures in the hedges, the changing light and shadow with their shifting colours, the whispering of a leaf, robins hopping on sear leaves, the slow movements of the clouds, fruits ripening in stillness—they are all presented before him with abiding marvel. This naive and vivacious wonder of nature is abundantly echoed in his earlier sonnets such as "O Solitude...", "How Many Bards gild the Lapses of Time!", "Happy is England...!", "After Dark Vapors..." and others. So we may count this wonder of nature as the first symptom of his wonders.

Next comes the second wonder—that of humanity. He kept it on till his death as the most important factor for sharpening his vision into the heart of human nature and for gaining profound insight into the secret of great production.

We must recall that most of his sonnets belonging to this period are those that take the form of 'dedication', and that they are mostly found in this period—especially in 1816. They are dedicated sometimes to his brothers or kinship, sometimes to his early friends such as Charles Wells, Georgina A. Wylie and Haydon, and sometimes to his literary predecessors such as Leigh Hunt. As a whole, they represent that the author was a person of warm humanity and of love, a poet who was ever conscious of how important the sympathy of humanity was to make him a true poet.

The earliest of these sonnets are generally want of balanced intensity; the wholeness of thought are often marred with too great

dispersion of sentiment and imagery. For example, such pieces as "To Byron" and "To Chatterton" are full of immature utterances of his vague yet ardent adoration of them. More mature and more important sonnets were written after his first meeting with Leigh Hunt which made him resolve to abandon medicine for poetry. Nightly meetings at Hunt's where many liberal discussions were had, thrilled the poet into compositions and placed him in a state of excessive excitement from which came a series of 'sleepless nights'. As the result of such fervent talks with literary celebrities, the sonnet, "Keen Fitful Gusts are Whispering..." was written.

Yet feel I little of the cool bleak air,
Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,
Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,
Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair:
For I am brimful of the friendliness
That in a little cottage I have found;¹⁾

In contrast with the coldness of a bleak winter night, Keats sang friendly warmth in the literary circle which warmly admitted him. We find also the poet's deep emotion and quiet joy that he was made one of the happy coterie and his pleasant wonder at the poetic domain newly opened before him. The poet's greatest wonder was, as Robin Mayhead hinted, a rich "talk about literature"²⁾ which later became the germ of his stupendous creation.

The same strain of wonder again reveals itself in the sonnet, "Addressed to Haydon (II)", where he showers his lavish praise on Wordsworth, Hunt and Haydon, calling their works "the hum of mighty workings in a distant mart". No wonder Keats thought

1) "Keen Fitful Gusts are Whispering...", 5-10.

2) Robin Mayhead: *John Keats* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 26.

highly of their achievements, for they were the chief influences over him who had just started his poetic life. General opinions consent it was chiefly through Hunt that Keats surrendered, at his earliest stage, to the mawkish sentiment and the luxuriousness of fancy, but it was also through Hunt that he could so quickly enter the lovely sphere of poetic kingdom. As for Wordsworth, it is widely known, Keats never spared passionate devotion to him as one who "martyred himself to the human heart." But regarding Haydon, he has been less known. It is, nevertheless, to be noted it was Haydon who not only helped the poet to get rid of Hunt's bad tendency of exaggeration and feeble extravagance by letting him turn his eyes to the original art of Shakespeare, but also introduced to him the famous Greek sculptures, well known in the name of the Elgin Marbles. In this respect Haydon was the very person that ignited some sacred fire of Helicon in Keats himself, and this sonnet was the very monument which expressed his admiration for the great preceptor as well as Wordsworth and Hunt.

One month before this—in October, 1816, Keats astounded the literary circle with the marvellous masterpiece, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer". It was indeed the first serious cry of the poet on art. No one could speak out the first utterance of wonder in discovering "the realm of gold" so forcibly and effectively as Keats. As J. M. Murry and W. Evert mentions, this is a poem of "the gold-seeking conquistador searching for *El Dorado*".¹⁾

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes

1) J. M. Murry: *Keats and Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1925), p. 148. & W. Evert: *Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 44-45.

He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.¹⁾

We all know the poem tells us of the poet's great wonder on reading Homer in Chapman's version. But is it all that the sonnet contains? The sonnet must have much more—in the phraseology of A. Ward, “something much larger—more universal, the rapture of discovery itself”²⁾ of a new planet swimming into the heaven and of the ocean. Keats himself does not explain what it is, so we can only guess. It may have been the poet's “continual uphill journeying”³⁾ into the realm of poetry or a discovery of the land “where he may find the agonies, the strife/Of human hearts”.⁴⁾

Anyway the poem is certainly “not as close to the level of Keats's finest poetry as some commentators would suggest”.⁵⁾ Though it has some touch of dramatic intensity and shows the effect of excellent awe-struck silence of those conquistadors, it lacks something beyond that surmise. The same is the case with the sonnet, “On the Grasshopper and the Cricket”. It begins with the famous first line, “The poetry of earth is never dead” which is a winning utterance of sureness in the immortality of art. The poetry of earth represented by the summer song of the grasshopper and the winter song of the cricket has indeed a marvellous “time-unity”⁶⁾ and gives us some hint of eternal poetry. Whether it is

1) *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, 9-14.

2) Aileen Ward: *John Keats* (Secker & Warburg, 1963), p. 76.

3) Letter to Leigh Hunt, 10 May, 1817.

4) *Sleep and Poetry*, 124-125.

5) Rohin Mayhead: *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

6) Bernice Slote: *Keats and the Dramatic Principle* (University of Nebraska, 1958), p. 38.

a real "chirping cricket"¹⁾ in his hospital days or a symbol of "the song of Apollo-God"²⁾, I do not know. This may sound his bold manifestation of the eternal life of art, but it has nothing more.

Strictly speaking, this sonnet and one on Chapman's Homer, are, however, the poet's enthusiastic and uncritical acceptance of the greatness of the past literature. Neither have they any poignant contradiction of the ideal and the real, nor any heart-rending sorrow or pain enough to break the equilibrium of his mind. In other words, they are simply representative of Keats's early period when he attached himself to the ideal atmosphere with voiceless and breathless wonder.

The sonnet, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles", written a week later after the publication of his first volume of poems, deserves a closer study. Because it reveals the poet's more self-conscious reaction to the concrete art of the Greek sculptures, the Elgin Marbles. In the previous days, Grecian mythology had been particularly congenial to him as a pleasant interfusion of ideal dream and sensuous life. But now mythology itself came to him with more shade of life and art—in the shape of the Elgin Marbles as a "dynamic something, itself the offspring of imaginative thought"³⁾ Not only was it a thing of great wonder to him but an incomparable revelation. In the presence of the marble statues, his whole being, not to speak of the mind, was overwhelmed with inexplicable awe and wonder. They were mighty symbols of life, truth and beauty for him. Such great artistic experience gave at once birth to the

1) Dorothy Hewlett: *A Life of John Keats* (Hurst & Blacket, 1950), p. 68.

2) W. Evert: *Op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

3) Clarence D. Thorpe: *The Mind of John Keats* (Oxford, 1926), p. 132.

following sonnet, which enabled him to make shift in his flight toward the true realm of Parnassus :

My spirit is too weak—mortality
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
 And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die
Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.
 Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep
 That I have not the cloudy winds to keep,
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
 Bring round the heart an undescribable feud ;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
 That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main—
 A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

Simply told, the theme is the idea of ' *vita brevis, ars longa* '. Here is an exquisite contrast between the mortality which is a life of the poet and the immortality that is the property of art. What the poet intended to say was the agony of Keats when he faced the perfect masterpieces of the Elgin Marbles and felt with sorrowful recognition how far he was from the ultimate goal of poetic perfection. He perceived how mournfully short man's life was to grasp the essence of art, though he could intuitively realize the inmost verity of eternal truth in those works of art. Thus thinking, he fell deep into a swoon-like state of weakness. He felt as if he were "one that gathers Samphire dreadful trade"¹⁾ and the cliff of poesy towered above him.

1) Letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, 10-11 May, 1817.

Such artistic experience meant for him an abiding marvel as well as a sense of awe, finally giving him "indescribable feud (11)" between the inner and the outer world in himself. Then he became aware of the most dizzy pain he had ever experienced before. It drove him into the contemplation as to the meaning of man and universe, or poet and art. His immense anxiety whether he could in future compose such masterpieces or not, was the chief cause of his pain, and the inner struggle makes the last four lines "almost a perfect expression of a momentary glimpse of infinitude".¹⁾

Accordingly, we learn from this sonnet it is the first important one which bears an antinomy of 'art' and 'ego', or 'world' and 'man'—that is, the sonnet of more profound voice of the poet's spiritual experience than that of wonder in the Chapman's Homer sonnet.

In this respect, it seems to have something more than "auto-biographical interest".²⁾ It is simply the sonnet that bids farewell to the earliest Keats of mere fancy and sensation.

Through the months in which the above sonnet was written, it must be added, Keats had been drinking deep of Shakespeare, following the suggestion of Haydon.

During his solitary stay at the Isle of Wight, what he read most was Shakespeare. This means that Keats had got free of the influence of Leigh Hunt and turned to Shakespeare. Strange to say, early in this period Hunt was a great predecessor who had taught him the taste for literature. This was why Keats at this time followed the Petrarchian sonnet-pattern imitating the rich sensuousness of Spenser and repulsing the stanza scheme of *Amoretti*. But

1) C. D. Thorpe: *Op cit.*, p. 130.

2) Dorothy Hewlett: *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

now the spell was unbound, as seen in the letter :

His (Hunt's) self delusions are very lamentable. They have enticed him into a situation which I should be less eager after than that of a galley slave...I think I could not be deceived in the manner that Hunt is—may I die tomorrow if I am to be.¹⁾

After criticizing Hunt, Keats remarked he had better die if he were to be deceived by Hunt's manner. After replacing Hunt, Shakespeare now became Keats's ever-warming draught, his pleasure and a source of spiritual strength. And with this great stimulus, there ceaselessly went through his mind a yearning passion for poetry. He wrote to his friend, Reynolds, "I find I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry—half the day will not do—the whole of it".²⁾ Solitude on the beautiful island affected his feeble soul with the heavy burden of poesy, and carried him far into the state of unrest and feverish thinking on the aim of poetry and his life. And the result was remarkable in the sonnet, "On the Sea" (1817). It begins with the haunting music of the sea's "eternal whisperings around/Desolate shores" (1-2) and ends with a cry of denouncing the ugly human society. It teaches us that those who are "vex'd and tir'd" (10) of the harrassed things of the earth and "whose ears are dinn'd with uproar rude/Or fed too much with cloying melody" (12-13) should return to the deep meditation in the stillness of nature and purified by it.

We must notice this negation of the human world and the acceptance of the soothing nature were the cardinal mood of Keats and seem to contradict themselves with his newly awakened creed

1) Letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, 10-11 May, 1817.

2) Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 17-18 April, 1817.

of wonder of humanity. His early immature notion of detachment was often revealed in his wonder of nature, while his growing consciousness of the world of reality came to be manifest partly in his wonder of art and partly in his wonder of humanity. The former wonder had its origin in the young poet's instinct for aesthetic escape. The latter grew out of his self-conscious efforts to face reality and see into the secret of life and art. Sometimes these wonders lose their definite borders and were mixed together and sometimes they are disunified, going in adverse directions.

So do these wonders a most dizzy pain
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main—
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.¹⁾

Here wonder of nature and wonder of art are one, or rather should I say the latter is compared to the former, gradually fusing into one. In this age of wonder we find in Keats various contradictory demands which would make their own ways. It is true the poet perceived at his earliest stage that mere dreaming of a detached life must be abandoned for a 'nobler life'. But the final reconciliation could not be made during the period and carried unsettled over to the next period. So the stage of poetic development here depicted is not Keats's last one but a necessary step in his ascent toward the higher plane which will reveal itself in the following chapters.

1) "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles for the first time", 11-14.

II

SELF-AWAKENING

Nothing is finer for the purpose of great productions than a gradual ripening of the intellectual powers.¹⁾

In the preceding chapter, I have shown how Keats at the earliest stage adhered to an apotheosis of the sensuous world of sheer wonder to the exclusion of the bitter world of reality, and that we could classify his wonder sonnets in the three categories.

Here I want to point out the striking shift in his intellectual progress that Keats first gained the wakening of his thinking principle and advanced himself well enough to be in "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought".²⁾

Gone are the days when he devoted himself to the exuberant revelry in the realm of fancy. Now his pleasant dream blasted out, he was obliged to look steadily upon the pain of the world, all alone on the limitless field of human reality.

At this crucial stage, he was by degrees learning how vain: he mere dreaming in the floral paradise had been to become a truly great poet. And he began arduously to form his own poetic theory of "Negative Capability", which was the basis of all of his liberal speculation, through the influences of Wordsworth and Shakespeare. The period of such self-awakening dawns with the sonnet, "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again".

1) Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 23 January, 1818.

2) Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 May, 1818.

But before taking it up, I think it is of much consequence to notice there was a gap of eight months in sonnet writing between the previous period and this—beginning from April, 1817 to the end of this year. This interval of reticence is very significant partly because it offers us a clue to realize the situation of the poet in progress and partly because it was the very time when he had on the one hand finished writing *Endymion* and on the other hand read fervently the works of Shakespeare.

During the year 1817 he was ardently saturating with the spirit of Shakespeare and his influences were accumulated one by one as his inner experiences.

But the young poet's acceptance of Shakespeare was not without judgement. In regard to Shakespeare's historical plays, he writes in *The Champion* (28 Dec. 1817) as follows :

They are written with infinite vigour, but their regularity tied the hand of Shakespeare. Particular facts kept him in the high road, and would not suffer him to turn down leafy and winding lanes, or to break wildly and at once into the breathing fields. The poetry is for the most part ironed and manacled with a chain of facts, and cannot get free.¹⁾

Thus, the young poet's insight was never obscured by the blindness of his high praises. Keats received Shakespeare with "unfettered scope of his own". What then did he learn from the predecessor? It was his universality, liberal imagination and especially dramatic intensity. Keats's longing for intensity in art is clearly announced in his letter to Reynolds which includes the

1) Quoted in Caroline F. E. Spurgeon: *Keats's Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1928), p. 6.

poet's first allusion to Shakespeare's sonnets.

One of the three books I have with me is Shakespeare's poems; I never found so many beauties in the sonnets—they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally—in the intensity of working out conceits. Is this to be born? Hark ye?...¹⁾

Immediately after this there follows the sonnet XII of Shakespeare. With reference to this intensity, we find another example just a month later in the letter to his brothers, where the word is repeated with more confidence and more decided tone.

The excellence of every art is its *intensity*, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine *King Lear* and you will find this exemplified throughout.²⁾

Keats, referring to Benjamin West's picture, wrote this paragraph, defining the very essence of art lies in its intensity which could be found in *King Lear*. For him, 'intensity' meant the depth of speculation which an artist should have. And he thought that with such momentous depth of speculation an artist must be born. Life without intensity was for him something ugly and abominable, though not "hardly worth living".³⁾

As known from some passages from his letters, Keats regarded *King Lear* as a typical evidence of Shakespeare's dramatic intensity. So it is no wonder that he attempted to seek for this intensity in the drama by reading it once more. Before transcribing

1) Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 22 November, 1817.

2) Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December, 1817.

3) Aileen Ward: *Op. cit.*, p. 260.

the sonnet, "On Sitting Down to Read 'King Lear Once Again', he made the following introductory remarks :

I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately—I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for a long time have been addicted to passiveness. Nothing is finer for the purpose of great production than a gradual ripening of the intellectual powers. As an instance of this, I sat down yesterday to read "King Lear" once again the thing to demand the prologue of a sonnet.¹⁾

O GOLDEN tongued Romance, with serene lute!

Fair plumed Syren, Queen of far-away!

Leave melodizing on this wintry day,

Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute :

Adieu! for, once again, the fierce dispute

Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay

Must I burn through; once more humbly assay

The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit :

Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion,

Begetters of our deep eternal theme!

When through the old oak Forest I am gone,

Let me not wander in a barren dream,

But, when I am consumed in the fire,

Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

The sonnet is, it can be easily recognized, a bald announcement of the poet who realized the importance of denouncing the sensation fostered by the Spenserian fancy for more serious study of living humanity. When paraphrased, the octave of the sonnet proves to be a farewell address to the sensuous life of which Spenser is

1) Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 23 January, 1818.

representative. In the first quatrain Spenser is, for example, "Fair plumed Syren (2)" and his *Faerie Queen* is the "Queen of far away (2)".

In the second quatrain he discloses his resolution to shut up the "olden pages (4)" and plunges himself into the fierce dispute between the inside and outside of him—that is, sensation and thought, in order to learn something about the bitterness of human wisdom, which is, in its essence, rather sweet. This active attitude of the poet may well bring him much pain and put him "in the flame of suffering".¹⁾

On the other hand, the sestet begins with the poet's invocation to the English Muse, Shakespeare, calling him a "chief poet". Now that he has once decided to "burn through (7)" the oak forest which seems analogous to the forest of thought, he refuses to "wander in a barren drem (12)"—to be drowned in the mere fanciful dream that bears no literary fruit worthy of any consideration. He implores the Muse to grant him with the wing of intuitive imagination to revive him to a new world when he perishes himself in the fire which will burn out his old self. As the world of Spenser becomes shadowy and dim, that of Shakespeare appears with more concrete image above the horizon of his mind.

We can however still see in this sonnet the two striking opposites repulsing each other—a will to remain in a sensuous world and a desire for new knowledge and philosophy. The former has something to do with Keats's aesthetic sensation and the latter with the poet's meditative and creative mind. Truly, this conflict between 'heart and head' is replaced with a kind of deep scepticism in the following work:

1) John Middleton Murry: *Keats and Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1925), p. 56.

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance,

.....
.....- then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.¹⁾

It should be remembered that this was the time when Keats had a rapidly maturing power and also some degree of threatening gloom. The suffering of existence and the anxiety for his future life as a poet were slowly beginning to press upon him, though not so decisively as in the next period. He is here declaring how important sympathy for the real humanity is to get a great poetic insight and how necessary knowledge and philosophy are for his real understanding of the "Burden of Mystery". The co-existence of those two opposites is sometimes a cause of his great suffering and of his scepticism.

In the King Lear sonnet, his impulse for a life of intellectual thought is predominant over that for a life of mere sensation. So we might reasonably say that it represents more than "his reaction against the poetry of romance in general".²⁾

"What the Thrush said", a Shakespearan blank-verse sonnet,

1) "When I have fears that I may cease to be", 1-8 & 12-14.

2) Claude Lee Finney: *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry* (Russel & Russel, 1963), p. 351.

is characterized with an entirely different mode of thinking. I am not sure whether it means "a change in his quest for the knowledge befitting a poet"¹⁾, but it teaches us how a poet should be in the creation of art.

O fret not after knowledge—I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmness.
O fret not after knowledge—I have none,
And yet the Evening listens. He who saddens
At thought of idleness cannot be idle. (9-13)

Though admitting the necessity of knowledge, Keats never sought after it impatiently. Such attitude of the poet can be explained in the term of "Negative Capability". It is an ability that "man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."²⁾ And this ability has much to do with his habitual mood of feeling: indolence. What it truly means for Keats is that it is not an ordinary kind of indolence but a state of spiritual meditation capable of great production or a repose of happy insensibility brooding for some time upon an object before it is sung into a poem. Keats found a vital congeniality between this lethargy and the Negative Capability of which Shakespeare alone was the great master. The poet gradually absorbed the ability in him. And the result was to such a remarkable degree that Keats wrote a series of fine sonnets—"Time's Sea...", "Four Seasons fill...", "On a Picture of Leander", "To Homer", and others. The following lines might well testify what calmness he had within his mind in his sure possession of

1) Charles I. Patterson, Jr.: *The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats* (University of Illinois Press, 1970) p. 105.

2) Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December, 1817.

Negative Capability.

.....quiet coves
His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
He furlleth close, contented so to look
On mists in idleness—to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.¹⁾

Though seemingly crude in form and sapless in diction, it never fails to convey a calm serenity of his soul. Read together with the other omitted lines, the sonnet proves to symbolize the whole career of man. The poet compares “four seasons in the mind of man (2)” to those of nature, thus making an “identification of human life with the natural cycle”.²⁾ Here Keats is successful in building an analogy between life and nature—especially in the quiet delineation of middle-aged autumn. The figure of Keats looking in idle receptiveness at autumnal phenomena is nothing but that of the greedy artist who are wisely storing various knowledges for his next production. In this respect, this idleness is akin to ‘creative idleness’ and also to the state of mind when Keats paraphrased “What the Thrush Said” in his letter: “Let us open our leaves and be passive and receptive—budding patiently under the eye of Apollo”.³⁾ Such receptivity—if combined with the active power of imagination—turns at once to creative activity.

The sonnet, “On a Picture of Leander” was the fruition of such creative mode of Keats. There we find a sweet harmony of sensation and thought—a fine example of the alchemy of this poet.

1) “Four Seasons fill the Measure of the Year”, 8-12.

2) Morris Dickstein: *Keats and His Poetry* (The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 133.

3) Letter to J. H. Reynolds, 19 February, 1818.

'Tis young Leander toiling to his death ;
Nigh swooning, he doth purse his weary lips
For Hero's cheek, and smiles against her smile.
O horrid dream ! see how his body dips,
Dead-heavy ; arms and shoulders gleam awhile :
He's gone ; up bubbles all his amorous breath !¹⁾

Though the poem is based on the sad legend of Hero, a beautiful priestess, and her lover, Leander, it is free from mawkishness, vague expression of thought or too excessive modification of mere sound and words. There exist splendid restraint of emotion and unequalled beauty of imaginative power. Allured with the terrible roaring of the stormy sea, we feel as if we were with Hero guiding the course of Leander through the dark sea and with the brave youth sinking deep in the fearful breakers. This is indeed an eloquent evidence of his axiom of beauty—"What imagination seizes as beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not".²⁾ Every beautiful image represented here may be taken as the spiritual verity the poet created. The poet, with the aid of intuitive imagination, projects himself into and merges himself in a complete identification with every imaginary object of his contemplation, making it a living reality, something as essential and authentic as a real event. Indeed, the sonnet is a marvellous piece in which intensity, wholeness, and naturalness make a trinity.

Now I come to the last sonnet of this period, the sonnet dedicated to Homer. Again the theme of this sonnet is a conflict between sensation and thought, and its main feature is well told in the following lines :

1) "On a Picture of Leander", 9-14.

2) Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November, 1817.

Aye on the shores of darkness there is light,
And precipices show untrodden green,
There is a budding morrow in midnight,
There is a triple sight in blindness keen ;¹⁾

The sonnet seems to have opposing elements : light and darkness, precipices and green land, morning and midnight, and sight and blindness. Keats introduced in this a notion of dual nature. One half of it cries for the untrammelled sway of penetrating imagination, and the other turns toward wisdom and knowledge. So on one side, he demands for metaphysical speculation to reject the sensuous life and on the other, strongly repulsive of logical thinking, seeks for ascending the altar of truth by the aid of sensation and imagination.

In the former, Milton is representative and the latter is typified by Homer,—that is, “Milton’s blindness” and “Homer’s old vigour” are the two ideal but opposing elements in this poem. Though the bitterness arising from such contradiction was by degrees on a way to threaten him, he himself managed to reconcile it. A week later he seems to have been successful in the reconciliation by combining sensation with knowledge.

The difference of high sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this—in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and with all the horror of a bare shouldered creature—in the former case, our shoulders are fledge, and we go through the same air and space without fear.²⁾

1) “To Homer”, 9-12.

2) Letter to J. H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818.

What he meant by the passage, was that sensation without knowledge was a dangerous thing and could not be fundamental to all creative activity unless it was equipped with true knowledge of artistic perception. Because knowledge itself offered the poet the more widened insight not only to take away the fever and fret, which gnawed at him, but to ease the "Burden of Mystery" with which the poet grappled.

But this reconciliation was ostentatious and temporary, as a careful consideration will show that sensation was predominant for Keats over knowledge because the latter was attached to the former in a supplementary force. "O for a life of sensation rather than thought"¹⁾ was for some time what Keats truly yearned for.

So he was still swinging himself between the poles, sometimes discarding one for receiving another. And in him they stood each other in a continual conflict and changed order of predominance.

This fact can be thrown into firmer belief by the suggestive remark Keats made in his note to Reynolds:

When we come to human life, it is impossible to know a parallel of breast and head can be drawn...It is impossible to know how far knowledge will console us for the death of a friend and the ill 'that flesh is heir to'.²⁾

Judging from what has just been discussed, it is evident Keats at this period could not actually effectuate his reasoned conclusion as to the antithesis between sensation and knowledge (thought or philosophy) imagination and reason, though he had been able to give us some methods to solve it.

1) Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November, 1817.

2) Letter to J. H. Reynolds, 3 May, 1818.

In the next chapter, I will try to trace his further development toward truth which is shown in his agonizing struggle to grasp the 'Principle of Beauty' through the reconciliation of the opposites already mentioned.

III

MORTAL AGONY

This is the most crucial and productive period in his whole poetic career. Because it is at this time that the poet first proved on his pulses the world is full of misery, pain, sickness and heart-breaking oppressions and he turned directly to the pursuit of "Burden of Mystery" through his bitter experience. And it is also the time when after a serious struggle he finally came to conquer the mystery with his newly acquired philosophy of suffering.

Indeed, the old conflict between sensation and thought still existed, but Keats's deep judgement taught him that the supreme artistic salvation would be consummated through intuitive insight enriched with his knowledge and thinking, actual contact with mankind and the genuine experience of the suffering of humanity.

What was then the dominant feature of this period? I should say it was agony, the one which on its basis had close connection with his *raison d'être* as a man and an artist. It overshadows the whole sonnets which fall into this period—eight ones from July 1818 to March 1819.

And the first symptom of agony is shown with a haunting shadow of death in the sonnet: "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns"

(1818). It was written by the grave of the Scotch poet, Robert Burns on Keats's walking tour of Scotland. In this sonnet, composed under the brooding influence of 'a sad ominous place', we find the poet in a strange mood of agony. Why did such mood come to be born? What did it mean? The solution, I think, lies partly in the tour itself and partly in his own mind.

In the beginning of the tour, he started with much hope and determination "to get more experience, rub off more prejudice, use me to more hardship" and "to strengthen more my reach in poetry than stopping no more among books".¹⁾ But as he proceeded northward, he gradually experienced much depression of heart and disillusion, together with the horrible mood of lethargy.

And this disillusion, accumulated by degrees, at last gave him deep depression and vacant melancholy. The scenery around him, though beautiful, had something foreign and strange to his taste, and the Kirkmen living there were of difficult access. It must be noted that Keats, a descendant from Middlesex, was by nature of southern disposition and he rather preferred warm and sunny countries—'fabled South'—to this barren, desolate and cold highland. So he felt something foreign to his proper self when he faced the cold Beauty of Scotland.

The tour, which he designed for himself as the only way of strengthening his insight into nature and life, proved that it could not always be a happy one, but rather an agonizing experience. It is no wonder that he confessed in his letter to his brother as follows :

This sonnet I have written in a strange mood, half-

1) Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 18-22 July, 1818.

asleep. I know not how it is, the Clouds, the Sky, the Houses, all seem Anti-Grecian and Anti-Charlemagnish.¹⁾

The leitmotif of the sonnet at first appears a little difficult, but soon becomes clear. It is a struggle between the ideal and the cold philosophy he opposed. The antithesis was so harsh that the poet was haunted with a shadow of death.

The town, the churchyard, and the setting sun,
The clouds, the trees, the rounded hills all seem,
Though beautiful, cold—strange—as in a dream,
I dreamed long ago, now new begun.
The short-liv'd, paly Summer is but won
From Winter's ague, for one hour's gleam ;
Though sapphire-warm, their stars do never beam :
All is cold Beauty ; pain is never done :
For who has mind to relish, Minos-wise,
The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue
Sickly imagination and sick pride
Cast wan upon it ! Burns ! with honour due
I oft have honour'd thee. Great shadow, hide
Thy face ; I sin against thy native skies.

In the first place, the octave shows the striking contrast between the poet and the desolate nature. All the visual, static images gathered together in the first two lines are suggestive of harsh cold reality and have something akin to those in the realm of death. For the poet those dark imageries are horrible hindrance to his earlier dream of chivalry and romance. But they are beautiful in their coldness and seem to be the true embodiment of beauty itself. Some deadly horror arrests him tightly, so he

1) Letter to Thomas Keats, 29 June, 1818.

quivers with it as if attacked by the fever of ague. Gradually the doubt fills his heart that a life which he has traced may have been "the short-liv'd paly summer" which in itself has no pain nor truth at all. At this stage his sensuous world is neglected and the cold Beauty seems to be acceptable.

In the sestet he dimly perceives the real beauty can be grasped only through pain. And pain is what the poet has so far escaped from, because it mars the pleasant vision of his former poetic world. Nevertheless the desire to emancipate his narrow view of life and to advance to the true beauty through his painful sympathy is manifest here.

Accordingly the poet, with some pain and sorrow, declares to leave his former self, dogmatic and sensuous Keats and approach "the cold Beauty", shaking the "dead hue" from it. Mr. Robert Gittings makes the sagacious comment on the Beauty that it was produced by the mingling of the miserable "history of Burns and the sinners in Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*".¹⁾ His interpretation of the composite images of the cold Beauty is well acceptable. But can we not add one more element in the mingling? It is Keats's own feeling of misery that he cannot reconcile his contradictions yet. It is right to consider Keats was scarcely out of his fatal conflict nor in a complete understanding yet. Anyway we must admit the sincere recognition he got as to the meaning of pain or suffering.

The following extract from his letter will be the sufficient evidence: "It is true out of suffering there is no greatness, no dignity; that in the most abstracted pleasure there is no lasting happiness".²⁾

1) Robert Gittings: *The Mask of Keats* (Heinemann, 1956), p. 17.

2) Letter to Thomas Keats, 3-9 July, 1818.

Here is no sign of his aesthetic escape into the dreamy sphere of sensation, no evidence to disprove the meditation of human pain with. If any, there is but an implacable agony in receiving a philosophy of suffering, or should I say, a passive pause to accept the reality as it is. The sonnet begins with a mood of lethargy and, after a 'Minos-wise' apprehension of human suffering, ends with a cry of anguish.

So it is not permissive to judge simply the sonnet is "by no means in his best vein"¹⁾ as Mr. Colvin does, or to think that "the bounds of the sonnet is here too narrow and the idea has missed expression". Keats's sonnets will miss the mark unless considered in the light of his long mental growth.

"Written upon the Top of Ben Nevis" is also the sonnet which shows the poet's agony and suffering. In it is expressed again something of "the Burden of Mystery". The poet invokes the Muse to teach him a lesson to solve the mystery, but he cannot fix his eyes on any stable points due to the "shroud vaporous (3-4)" and falls into his "intellectual perplexities".²⁾

Read me a lesson, Muse, and speak it loud
Upon the top of Nevis, blind in mist!
I look into the chasms, and a shroud
Vapourous doth hide them,—just so much I wist
Mankind do know of hell; I look o'erhead,
And there is sullen mist,—even so much
Mankind can tell of heaven; mist is spread
Before the earth, beneath me,—even such,
Even so vague is man's sight of himself!

1) Sidney Colvin: *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

2) Arthur H. Bell: "Keats and Human Space", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, XXIII (1974), p. 79.

Here are the craggy stones beneath my feet,—
Thus much I know that, a poor witless elf,
I tread on them,—that all my eye doth meet
Is mist and crag, not only on this height,
But in the world of thought and mental might!

The main theme implied here is a sort of agnosticism. For the past few months Keats experienced extraordinary events of life —“life’s little ironies”¹⁾ such as the farewell with his brother George, the nursing of a dying brother Tom, and coming across the fierce struggle for existence in the animal world. In Brown’s letter to Snook he says that “a swarm of sea gulls attacked a shoal of herrings” and so completely destroyed them that “water was all literally spangled with herrings scales”.²⁾ The mixture of such events compelled Keats to feel the siege of contraries in this sonnet, driving him into agnosticism. The place the poet now stands is the summit, an intermediate place between heaven and the earth. But the places he aspires after are heaven (the poetical world of eternal Beauty) and the earth (human reality). He cannot reach either of them, because there are two great hindrances—‘mist’ symbolizing the Burden of Mystery and ‘crag’ implying earthly woes. Unless he drinks deep out of the cup of earthly woes, and gets some wisdom of his own, the mist of mystery cannot be cleared away. For that end, not only is it required of him to ‘know of hell’ (the worst misery of humanity), but also to ‘tell of heaven’ (his ideal truth,—beauty).

How can, however, such supreme insight be given to the man

1) Bernard Blackstone, *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

2) Keats and his fellow traveller, Brown were on their way to Oban when they saw the sight.

who is a 'poor witless elf' and has no 'sight of himself'? So thinking, he deplorably declares: "that all my eyes doth meet/Is mist and crag, not only on this height/But in the world of thought and mental might!"

These lines obviously suggest there is a dual conflict in his mind, 'mist and crag'—the one which belongs to the spiritual and the other to the earthly. They exist in the natural world as well as in the human mind. And they are explained as the conflict between imaginative detachment and philosophy—in other words, principle of Beauty and philosophy of life. In the opening of his Scotch tour he already mentioned: "I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for philosophy—were I calculated for the former I should be glad—but as I am not I shall turn all my soul to the latter".¹⁾

But this might not be taken as an evidence of his decisive swing toward philosophy, to the exclusion of another. Because it merely means he should be made wiser by accumulating knowledges, widening his experiences and getting more wisdom necessary for his flight to ideal truth. Here the poet was trying to reconcile his burning passion for the beautiful with his true sympathy with the actual world, 'the world of thought and mental might'. But Keats's adherence to the former was too potent to be easily put away, and the 'mist'—the Burden of Mystery was obstinately bearing upon him. The poet, unable to make an alternative leap into either of them, was put in a dilemma between the two. This is why the sonnet is full of scepticism and agony. It is too much to say to define the sonnet as a work of "man's incapacity to read

1) Letter to John Taylor, 24 April, 1818.

any lesson from nature but that of his own ignorance."¹⁾ We should rather interpret it as a piece denoting his antithesis of the universe and man, ideal and reality, detachment and philosophy.

Such is the very secret that connects this sonnet with the more poignant one, "Why did I laugh tonight?"

Why did I laugh tonight? No voice will tell:
No God, no Demon of severe response,
Deigns to reply from heaven or from Hell.
Then to my human heart I turn at once.
Heart! Thou and I are here sad and alone;
I say, why did I laugh! O mortal pain!
O darkness! Darkness! ever must I moan,
To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain.
Why did I laugh? I know this Being's lease,
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads;
Yet would I on this very midnight cease,
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds;
Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed.

It might be reasonably taken as the most agonizing cry of his inner antithesis—the apex of his deepest conflict. At first sight, there seem to be extant nothing but a laugh of cynical despair, but more scrutinized reasearch would tell us it marks the greatest turning point in his poetic development—from a labyrinthian wandering to the sure acceptance of the 'philosophy of suffering'.

The main theme is not his homage to death, but the conquest of it—the reconfirmation of the value of death. For the past two years Keats was afflicted with some kind of suffering or other

1) Walter Evert: *Op. cit.*, p. 217.

and in a sort of apathy 'indolent and supremely careless'. This was caused by the conflict of the three opposing elements, Poetry, Fame, and Love which were raging about in his inner soul. A sudden shift in this state of apathy drove him to such a point that he uttered a laugh of bitterness one night. He added the note to the sonnet that it was written when affected by the "buffets of the world" with "no agony but that of ignorance" and "with no thirst of anything but knowledge".¹⁾ This remark, though self-sarcastic and ironical, was grave and serious.

He sought for the cause of his laugh for heaven, hell and heart in vain. Because the failure lay in the premise that they could answer him. In despair he first wished to die in a negative way but next he wished to embrace it actively. Because he realized death would no more be the mere negation of all that he had adored, if viewed with understanding.

Such revelational acceptance of death is the key-note to the sonnet and has close affinity with the term, 'dying into life'²⁾ in *Hyperion*. It symbolizes the swift transition from the conscious acceptance of death to the full understanding and re-discovery of life in its highest form. Is it difficult to refer Keats's notion of death to that of Oriental meditative philosophy—especially to that of Tagore, an Indian great philosopher?

Tagore whispers with utmost calm his faith in death in his book, *Stray Birds* (1917): "Death's stamp gives value to the coin of life; making it possible to buy with life what is truly precious".³⁾ The remark has something common with the last line of the sonnet,

1) Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 Feb.—3 May, 1819.

2) *Hyperion*, Book III, 130.

3) Rabindranath Tagore: *Stray Birds* (Macmillan, 1917), p. 26.

“Death is life’s high meed.” And further Tagore says : “In death the many becomes one ; in life the one becomes many.”¹⁾

This is so important an utterance and gives suggestion as to how harmony can be made between antipodes. So long as man clings to life, he can by no means come to unite himself, and has many conflicting elements left unsolved. But once he puts aside worldly desires, then a multitude of doubts and antitheses will be transfigured into one truth. Death purifies everything and gives it a true unity.

In the case of Keats, the process of receiving death was to plunge ‘ego’ into something richer and more universal, as exemplified in his *Ode to a Nightingale*, and to become identical with the object he pursued, the eternal idea of Beauty. To speak more paradoxically, the desire for self-annihilation leads to “the desire for death, the wish to be wholly free of the Burden of self-hood.”²⁾ For Keats, death was neither the mere negation of life, nor “an event which divides two existences”³⁾ but it was ‘life’s high meed’. It was “not the constant hidden enemy of life” but a kind of intense luxury or triumph whether it might be good or evil. The divided, fretful and feverous Keats was, thus, transmuted to the unified, calm and assured Keats by the working of death. But we must remember here the secret of creative activity was solely due to that penetrating, sympathetic power of his ‘Negative Capability’. With this faculty, he could combine various contradictions into one unity. And it was also possible for him to grasp everything in its dual nature, from which he evoked serious ques-

1) R. Tagore: *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

2) Morris Dickstein: *Op. cit.*, p. 212.

3) Earl R. Wasserman: *The Finer Tone* (The John Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 195.

tions in art, and could "reach as high a summit in poetry".

Seen in this way, it would be reasonably recognized that Keats came to understand in his famous letter to the Georges that the Principle of Beauty might naturally be within his grasp only through the poet's complete apprehension of pain.¹⁾

In the letter he offered us the most serious and mature theory called "a grandeur system of salvation".²⁾ To epitomize briefly, Keats discarded the popular notion that life is as sorrowful as a 'vale of tears', in that it is not only an endless succession of mortal sorrows, but also a history of eternal woes and illusion. In the poet's new interpretation it is suitable to call the world 'the vale of Soul-making'.³⁾ Because the sorrows and hardships which had once seemed to him incompatible with the aim of his poetry and gave him much agony were now considered necessary to the formation and development of a true creative mind.

Through such pain and sorrow in life the poet could be allowed to reach the principle of Beauty which must be truth. This is what I mean by the terms, 'philosophy of suffering'. In summing up, Keats's sonnets at this time were mostly featured with the common strain of agony and with the reconfirmation of the value of death.

1) Sister Thekla: *John Keats* (Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption, 1973), p. 186.

2) Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 Feb.—2 May, 1819.

3) *Ibid.*

IV

CRYSTALLIZATION

In the previous chapter I examined how Keats's personal agonizing experiences had led him to the more mature understanding that the Burden of Mystery must be untied in his acceptance of individual death and also of the harsh reality as a necessary part in the "great scheme of Soul-making".

So what is left in this chapter, is to make a plausible elucidation as to how the final reconciliation of his theory of poetic detachment and his philosophy of human suffering could at last be brought about, and to indicate how the poet, after a long tormenting struggle with antipodes, could come to the crystallized state of mind where mortality and immortality would make an exquisite coincidence.

There are eight sonnets—all Shakespearean in rhyme-pattern except two—which will come down into this period of crystalization. And they were written from April 1819 to September 1820. "To Sleep" is the first one. The poet wrote it after the time of "idle fever" which occupied nearly three months from mid-February to the end of April 1819. Here sleep is expressed "soothes sleep" or "soft embalmer of still midnight". And its serene hymn over-spreads the whole lines with "its lulling charities".

No more can we see in it any trace of that despairing agony of "Why did I laugh tonight?" nor any painful mark when the poet had been on the brink of conquering death. All that is seen, is but his quiet attitude towards a sweet and soothing sleep. Such

notion of sleep is different from his former one—for example, the poet calls it in *Endymion*, “O magic sleep” and goes on saying:

..... just key
To golden palaces, strange Minstrelsy
Fountain grotesque, new trees, bespangled caves;
Echoing grottos, full of tumbling waves
And moonlight; aye to all the mazy world
Of silvery enchantment.¹⁾

From the above passage it becomes clear that Keats at earlier stage conceived ‘sleep’ as a golden key to an unearthly romantic sphere of fanciful sensation, while in the sonnet, “To Sleep” he takes it as a soothing anodyne to ease the violent conflict in his soul.

The poet who implored sleep ‘to seal the hushed casket of my soul (14)’, was also able to come at the same serenity of mind in his interpretation of ‘fame’. He could say with a calm serenity about the most embarrassing object of every aspirer in poetry.

How fevered is the man who cannot look
Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,
Who vexes all the leaves of his life’s book
And robs his fair name of its maidenhood.²⁾

In comparison with this light coolness of “Fame”, the utterance in “To Sleep” has some traces of his excessive agony of the preceding period.

Then save me, or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes;

1) *Endymion*, Book I, 456-461.

2) “On Fame (II)”, 1-4.

Save me from curious conscience, that still lords
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed casket of my soul.¹⁾

Such serious pronouncements of the artist were already illustrated in his letter to Haydon. He confessed he came to the resolution "never to write for the sake of writing or making a poem, but running over with any little knowledge of experience which many years of reflection may perhaps give me: otherwise I will be dumb ...With respect to my livelihood, I will not write for it".²⁾ He was now able to understand that everything, whether it might be foul or fair, right or wrong, could naturally come into his being if he worked out his own salvation in himself with gradually accumulated knowledges, experiences and wisdom.

Nearly a fortnight before, he composed the sonnet, "On a Dream" after reading Dante's episode of Paolo and Francesca, and copied it in his letter to the Georges:

The fifth canto of Dante pleases me more—it is that one in which he meets with Paolo and Francesca—I had passed many days in rather a low state of mind and in the midst of them I dreamt of being in that region of Hell. The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life...³⁾

As Hermes once took to his feathers light,
When lulled Argus, baffled, swoon'd and slept,
So on a Delphic reed, my idle spright

1) "On a Dream", 9-14.

2) Letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, 8 March 1819.

3) Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 Feb.—3 May 1819.

So play'd, so charm'd, so conquer'd, so bereft
 The dragon-world of all its hundred eyes;
 And, seeing it asleep, so fled away—
 Not to pure Ida with its snow-cold skies,
 Nor unto Tempe where Jove griev'd a day;
 But to that second circle of sad hell,
 Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
 Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
 Their sorrows. Pale were the sweet lips I saw,
 Pale were the lips I kiss'd, and fair the form
 I floated with, about that melancholy stoam.

In analyzing this sonnet, we must recall to mind that there had been three conflicting powers in him—Poetry, Love, and Fame and that the last was finally sublimated in the sonnet "On Fame". Poetry and Love, however, still remained unsatisfied when other contradictions in art had been almost completely reconciled. His devotion to Poetry seemed so far to promise him no reward either in reputation or in bread, while Beauty itself soared high above his reach. And it remained for him as the "mighty abstract idea of Beauty in all things" that "stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness".¹⁾

But the day came when his prayer for the beauty in general could come into fruition, with his craving passion for the beauty in a particular girl, Fanny Brawne. The vision of the beautiful figure mentioned in the sonnet was an incarnation of his idea of Beauty as well as the embodiment of his love.

Here, his poetic dream into the second circle of sad Hell is mingled with his fresh desire for unfettered love. Indeed this is

1) Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14-31 October 1818.

a rare piece in which his creative imagination transmutes his own personal experiences into some spiritual reality and creates a new form of beauty in ethereal substances "greater than our Creator himself has made". The sonnet also shows the poet's faculty of penetrating into any spheres of universe—the faculty of identity—whether they may be foul or beautiful, dark or bright, with intuitive free will. This is the primary evidence that Keats reached his complete mastery of sonneteering. In metre, the long last line, with its extra Alexandrine, retains a lingering sweetness to this beautiful sonnet and conveys to us a strange rapture and melancholy of sad Hell. And the whole sonnet has beautiful crystallization of his love and sublimation of beauty.

In this sense, I can never bring myself to follow Mr. Ford's interpretation: "rather than chastening him, as Dante intended, the infernal punishment of the lovers lost all moral significance and was transformed into a luxurious sex-dream".¹⁾ Likewise, D'avanzo's interpretation to take it for "a sexual dream, in a strikingly Freudian manner"²⁾ can be also rejected as a shallow one. Mr. J. M. Murry considers that the anguish of the sonnet resulted from his "impossible love".³⁾ Indeed it gives us a portion of truth, but it is, we find, exaggerated in his own way, for there could never be any possibility of the "impossible love" at the very time when the poet engaged himself to his love.

In fact, the year 1819 was when his final struggle toward the principle of Beauty had been fought at the cost of his earthly life,

1) Newell F. Ford: *The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats* (Stanford University Press, 1951), p. 126-127.

2) Mario L. D'avanzo: *Keats's Metaphors for the Poetic Imagination* (Duke University Press, 1967), p. 124.

3) J. Middleton Murry: *Op. cit.*, p. 124.

though he had already reconciled some of his old conflicts in art and life. Beauty and Poetry were now his antipodes in life. In his gradually abating physical power, Keats felt acutely that they must be conquered at all. In this way, Keats's anguish was the result of the two desirables which had seemed to him rather divided and also the result of his pathetic consciousness of his approaching death. On July 1st, he wrote to his love, confessing: "I have never known any unalloyed happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of someone has always spoilt my hours—and now when none such troubles oppress me, it is you must confess very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me".¹⁾

For him death must be conquered in the sonnet, "Why Did I Laugh Tonight?" but there arose another trouble of his fatal love for Fanny Brawne, in addition to the unsolved question how to identify beauty and truth. Keats, as young poet and lover, intended to seek his ideal beauty in the person of his love. But she ever failed to satisfy his demand by her rather thoughtless acts, so the poet was always driven away into an incessantly distracted state of mind, wandering between fever and depression. As his love letters well testify, he was in a continual disparity of mind, torn with poetry and love.

He managed to break through the trammels of love and to find himself in the fever of creation, his only remedy against his indulgence in love. Yet this attempt proved not always successful, as illustrated in *Lamia*, which had been finished about this time. There are such lines of torment in love:

O sensuous Lycius! Dolt! Fool! Madman! Lout!

1) Letter to Fanny Brawne, 1 July 1819.

Why would you murder your happiness like yours?")

Despite his attempt to control himself and be more reasonable, his love put him into a devouring passion, almost making him a poor prey to her.

Sometimes he was in a horrible uneasiness, stimulated by his dark doubt that Fanny would neither love him nor understand his works with due honour. And sometimes he was full of happiness in his sheer fascination of her tender loveliness.

In the first sonnet to Fanny, his love, there lingers a calm respite of his intense happiness after his brief encounter with her

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semi-tone,
Bright eyes, accomplish'd shape, and lang'rous waist!
Faded the flower and all its budded charms,
Faded the sight of beauty from my eyes,
Faded the shape of beauty from my arms,
Faded the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise—
Vanish'd unseasonably at shut of eve,
When the dusk holiday—or holineight
Of fragrant-curtain'd love begins to weave
The woof of darkness thick, for hid delight;
But, as I've read love's missal through to-day,
He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray.

With its rich and sensuous imageries, with its swift movement of sweet cadence and its soft fragrance of closing lines, it might be said one of the most lyrical sonnets ever written by him. Here Keats shows some attempt on his part to reconcile his yearning

1) First draft of *Lamia*, Part II, 147-8.

passion for the beautiful with that for the truth of poetry to a successful degree. And some religious colour seen in the closing lines will coincide with his remark on his peculiar religion in his letter of October 13: "I have been astonished that man could die martyrs for religion—I have shudder'd at it. I shudder no more—I could be martyr'd for my religion—Love is my religion".¹⁾

But the happiness was precarious and did not last long. Now that love had become his religious creed, it necessarily pressed on him the other gloomy half of it—such as jealousy, torment and pain. So if he would be faithful to love, he should be doomed into an gony of love. Thus his painful consciousness of the improbability of being a poet and the torment of love, compelled him to the piteous frenzy of "I cry your mercy—pity—Love!" Why he was thrown into such a stormy cry of anguish was preliminarily stated in his letter a day before.

I must impose chains upon myself. I shall be able to do nothing. I should like to cast the die for Love or Death. I have no patience with anything else...²⁾

After a swift repetition of his temporary surrender to despair and momentary joy in love, his true personality as a poet was gradually formed with the aid of his own watchfulness and intelligence. He had indeed a surprising ability to transmute his own tragedy into some material to create a work of art. For him, the world was not 'a vale of tears' from which we were to be 'redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven'.³⁾ He rejected this Christian system of salvation. The world was for him

1) Letter to Fanny Brawne, 13 October 1819.

2) Letter to Fanny Brawne, 19 October 1819.

3) Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 Feb.—3 May 1819.

'the vale of Soul-making', because he recognized how necessary this world of pains and troubles, including his own, was to school human intelligence and give birth to a great work. And he thought this system of salvation could be effectuated by three materials,—the *Intelligence*, the *human heart* and the *world*. The more harsh the outer and inner conflict grew for him, the more strenuously he cultivated his faculty of penetrating himself into human reality, guided by the system. And his private painful life-experiences were re-orientated as the means to realize the more universal aspect of human truth.

What he now understood was that any great poem has its motive in the universal heart of man and that a poet must, with a sympathy with the world around him, transform what he thinks beauty into a thing of beauty and truth.

This process of beauty-truth identification is best and ultimately portrayed in his last sonnet, "Bright Star". Of its first version, there have been much arguments about its dating and woman model. Apart from it, I will here discuss the sonnet of the final version. It was written perhaps on the 29th of September, 1820, on his death voyage to Italy.

Before making any interpretation about the sonnet, I think it worth noting in what mood the poet was before and during the voyage. The voyage began with his pathetic farewell to his beloved Fanny on September 13th, without the least hope to see each other again in life. We can see how Keats's mind was self-restrained then, in spite of heart-rending sorrow deep within him. A tragic letter written on board the ship for Italy illustrates this very well :

The very thing which I want to live most for will be

a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state...? I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even these pains, which are better than nothing.¹⁾

This paradoxical saying reveals that Keats was this time in great mental perplexities that he wished for death to escape mortal pains and at the same time wished death away, lest it should destroy those pains which in some way would serve him.

At this time Keats's pain, it may be conjectured, two-fold: one is the pain originating from his conflict with art and another from that unbearable grief of his being torn away from his love. The thought of leaving her was more than he could bear. To see daily vanishing native coast of England in the sadness of his heart appeared to the sick poet a sorrowful omen of his receding life and also that fading figure of love with whom he could never meet again in life. As he became aware of his life going away, he must have been absorbed in a deep lamentable meditation. And moreover a sure possession of the long-sought ideal was not yet taken. Under such circumstances of feverish thought and recurring depression, the voyage must have been made with slow space.

There came, however, a quiet evening to him who was long imbued with melancholy despair. One night, off the Dorsetshire coast, Keats must have listened to the rippling sound of water against the ship or just audible breath of wind rustling through the wan canvases. He would then have felt all of his sorrows softly withdrawing like the sound of waves and his agonized self, purified

1) Letter to Charles Brown, 30 September 1820.

with watery light of stars, become ethereal and buoyant and all the emotions that had haunted him, now being harmonized into one single object—to the crystallized love. And this caused the poet to dedicate his sincere prayer to the Bright Star.

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

In the octave he symbolizes his emotive experiences which he has hitherto had by using concrete natural imageries; so that 'moving waters', 'earth's human shores', 'new soft fallen mask of snow' are all the symbols of swift passing phases of nature as well as those of the poet's earlier stage of life spent in the sensuous wandering. And they form an obvious contrast to the imperishable star in the heaven. The star seems to mean Keats's final goal of poetry, the principle of Beauty that is in essence truth.

At first the star is watched as a steadfast verity and then becomes "one of the intent gazers"¹⁾ watching the mutability of

1) John Jones: *John Keats's Dream of Truth* (Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 232.

the earth. It is a symbol of eternity and also "an ideal beauty latent amid the element of human perception".¹⁾

In comparison with the spiritual permanence of the octave, the sestet, one would think, is nothing but the sensual expression which the ill poet uttered of the physical beauty of his love. But this is not the case. The sestet does not imply "the mere sexual dream" nor a sleep of an erotic monomaniac. And Mr. Pettet's view to interpret it as "a sleep of terrifying dream revelation, of love as a cruel destroyer, of love that is death"²⁾ in a negative way may be acceptable in the first draft only.

Every rich image drawn here is not the mere vision of a sensuous poet, but it transforms itself into the pure imaginative experience of a serious poet.

As I have already hinted, Fanny is here shown as a symbol of beauty far above an earthly woman. For Keats, to be entirely absorbed in the beauty of his love was to get purified and to be awake in the eternal life of beauty itself. Because she was, so to speak, a spiritual medium or daemon like Margarete in Goethe's *Faust* or Beatrice in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. She was in this sense potent enough to lead the poet up to the eternal bourne of Beauty.

In "Bright Star", the desire of the poet for the immortality of the star is the desire for his principle of Beauty through the aid of this *Ewig-Weibliche*, the very soul of Fanny Brawne. And the desire of the poet for the sensual beauty of his love originates in his desire to make their love immortal through their pure affection and the idealization of her physical love.

1) Stuart M. Sperry: *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

2) E. C. Pettet: *On the Poetry of Keats* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 214.

I think it is, therefore, improper to say the sestet has too many erotic images. If we compare the original first version with the final, the former is far more tinged with physical love than the latter.

The five concluding lines of "Bright Star" originally read as follow:

Cheek-pillow'd on my love's white ripening breast,
To touch, for ever, its warm sink and swell,
Awake, for ever, in a sweet unrest;
To hear, to feel her tender-taken breath,
Half-passionless, and so swoon on to death.¹⁾

There is an explicit difference between the two versions. In the final version, such obviously erotic words as 'cheek' and 'white' are eliminated. And in the last line, the conjunction 'and' is used to connect 'Half-prssionless' and 'so swoon on to death' in the first version, while the second adopts the conjunction 'or' instead of 'and'. This means the death sung in the first is 'ecstatic death' as a sequel to physical love, whereas that in the final is 'pathetic and alternative death' of choosing love or death. The former is a bold announcement of sensual love, and the latter is a hymn of spiritual love. Mr. Ricks, comparing the two versions, says that the lines, "Cheek-pillowed on my love's ripening breast..." of the first, have "a fuller candour"²⁾ and more ample effect than those of the final. But his interpretation sounds a little paradoxical.

As a whole, it seems most likely that the second-version sonnet symbolizes in its brief compass the whole of his poetic life, remarkably balancing the opposite antithesis within him. Each con-

1) The First Manuscript Version of "Bright Star", 10-14.

2) Christopher Ricks: *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford, 1974), p. 112.

crete natural imagery is in identity with the poet's life-experience and becomes a pattern for his career. And duality—mortality (the poet) versus immortality (the star)—in the octave can summarize all the agonizing conflicts which have ever gnawed at his mind and given him much suffering.

The fusion of these two opposites is achieved as the result of the poet's most painstaking efforts to transmute his personal agonies, pains and sorrows into a coherent whole—something that is universal and eternal.

And this identity is made through the intuitive faculty of imagination. Imagination has not only the "synthetic and magical power to reconcile opposites or discordant qualities"¹⁾, but also the capacity to create spiritual reality, "greater than those of the Creator himself". With this capacity, Keats, having an imaginative experience with Fanny in the sestet, raises her to a spiritual verity. She is no more a living woman but something lofty and spiritual—his ideal of Beauty itself. She is identical with the principle of Beauty and now breathing ethereal like a star of immortality. In other words, the beauty thus perceived is the very essence of truth, for beauty is nothing but the final goal of poetry, truth. And for him beauty is won by the intuitive perception of intellectual imagination—imagination equipped with his own experience, thought and wisdom which the poet acquired at the cost of his life.

Keats's profound insight finds its concentrated symbolic expression in the vision of eternal truth-beauty, Bright Star. Thus, truth, beauty and Fanny are now in a complete harmony, and many other contradictions are likewise subdued into one unity.

From this viewpoint, no one could be willing to admit the

1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*. ed. by G. Watson (Dent, 1965), p. 174.

sonnet has its conclusion of "inferior effects" against the "lofty, almost heroic, gravity of its opening".¹⁾ Nor is Mr. Ford's conclusion acceptable that the reconciliation is never performed in this sonnet because its imaginative whole is based on "duality which is forever impossible of dissolution".²⁾ The duality appears to be hard to solve, but in fact it is possible, as I have so far mentioned.

In its sincere prayer to the star, the sonnet has almost "semi-religious aura"³⁾ in the octave and is featured with the noble passion "attuned to tranquility".⁴⁾

Indeed, of all his sonnets, this is most refined in its emotion and most lyrical in its symbolical beauty. Here all his former agonies are beautifully crystallized into a serene mood and there can be found no bit of pains born of the tormenting conflicts between the ideal and the real. No anguish, no woe, no misery, no fear, no despair in it. In spite of turbulent agitation, there exist a quiet equanimity of spirit which shows that truth has been known and beauty has finally been attained.

The mind of Keats here becomes a kind of filter through which everything is percolated, purified and lastly organized into the principle of Beauty. It is for this reason that I call this creative period by the term, "crystallization", judging it as the supreme stage in his poetic growth.

"Bright Star" is thus the most poignant and typical piece in which Keats blended into one the immortality of the star and the mortality of earthly love. It is neither a work of subjective

1) H. W. Garrod: *John Keats* (Oxford, 1926), p. 57.

2) Newell F. Ford: *Op. cit.*, p. 146-147.

3) Douglas Bush: *John Keats*, p. 119.

4) Sidney Colvin: *Op. cit.*, p. 202.

and sensual day dream nor of "supreme irony"¹⁾ coming from the incompatible duality. He can now freely reconcile his old conflicts between sensation and thought, imagination and knowledge, detachment and philosophy, beauty and truth, and many other similar antitheses he has been ever vexed with.

Nothing is more remarkable and moving than so profound an evolution Keats made in his brief career of sonnet writing and finally consummated in his last sonnet of "Bright Star".

1) Newell F. Ford: *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

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